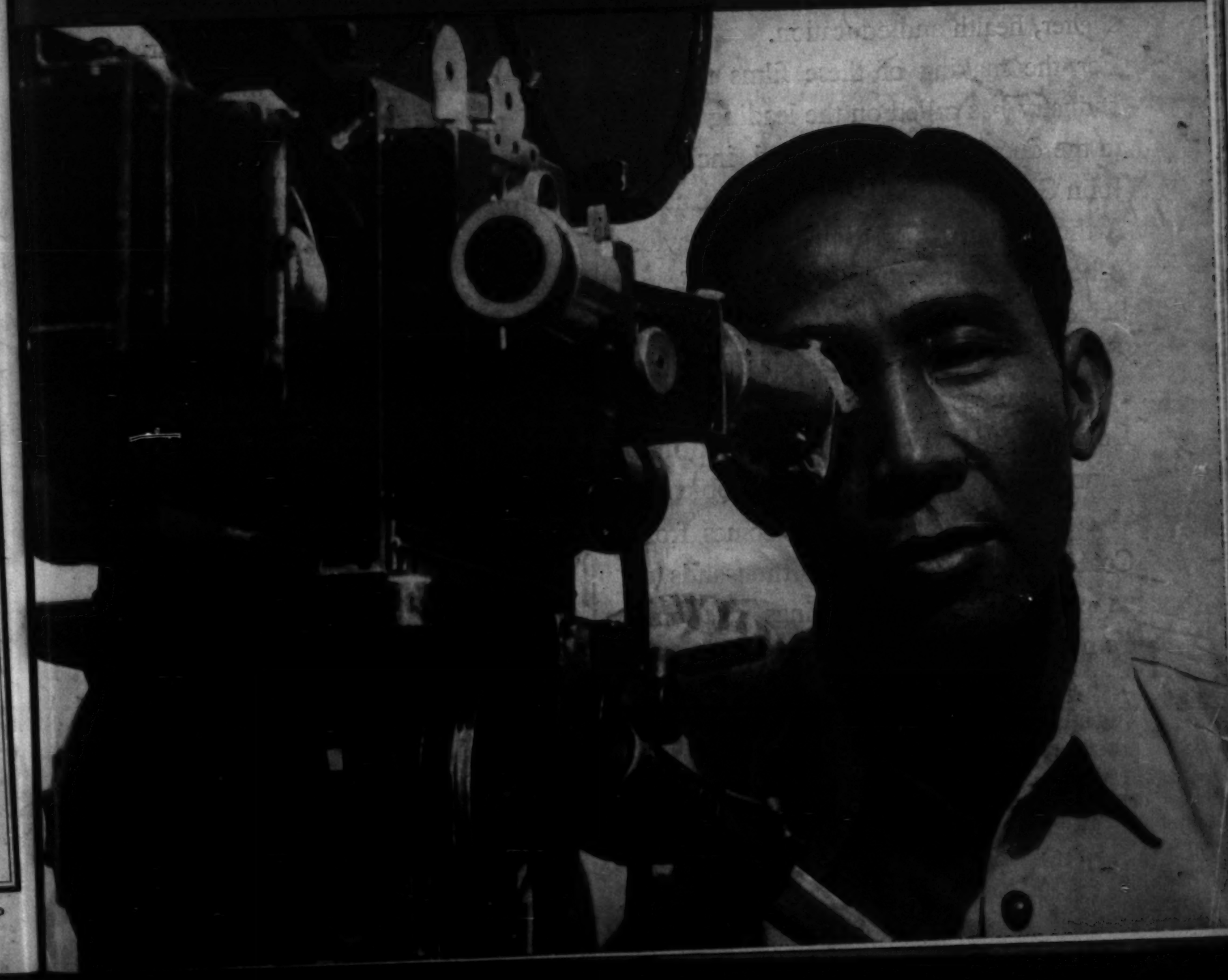
# DOCUMENTARY

NEWS LETTER

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1945 ONE SHILLING

IN THIS ISSUE: Wartime Wedding by John Sheerman; Society, Science and Movie by a Psychiatrist; Grierson takes Stock; Malayan Road-Show; Municipal Cinema in Norway; and Documentary Perspective. Notes of the Month, Film Reviews and Book Reviews



D HERTFORD

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# DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

Editorial Board: Edgar Anstey, Geoffrey Bell, Arthur Elton, John Taylor, Basil Wright

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*DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER* first appeared in January, 1940, as a duplicated sheet for circulation to private subscribers. The first issue aroused sufficient interest to justify the appearance of No. 2 as a printed magazine which has since achieved an influential circulation in Britain and overseas, but has continued to be available only to the subscriber. Now, with our fifty-fourth issue, we go out to the newsagents and the booksellers and prepare to welcome new readers.

*Documentary News Letter* was founded to serve a specific need. With the outbreak of war in 1939 it became clear to a group of practitioners in the documentary field—experts in production and distribution—that they must somehow become articulate in the interests of the proper use of the film for purposes of wartime information and instruction. The members of the original Editorial Board had most of them been associated with the documentary film movement since its earliest days. Working with John Grierson first at the Empire Marketing Board and later with the Post Office Film Unit they had collaborated in developing techniques of documentary production and distribution. When the war began they had expected to find that the Government would immediately use the film as an instrument of public defence, that documentary film-makers would be mobilised to inform the public of the vital issues involved and to assist in the preparation of the Armed Forces and the civil population for the hard times ahead. It was assumed that the newly established Ministry of Information would see this as one of its principal functions.

Yet although the quality of British documentary film making was recognised in every country in the world, although indeed the documentary film had come to be widely regarded as the only original British contribution to the development of the film medium, the Ministry of Information ignored the instrument which lay ready to its hand.

It was almost exclusively to combat this combination of lethargy and antagonism that the group of documentary film experts associated with Film Centre decided that they must appeal to enlightened opinion throughout the country in the interests of an efficient use of the documentary film. Other methods besides the publication of *D.N.L.* were also used in the campaign that followed—articles in other publications, lectures, private meetings with politicians and civil servants—and eventually the Ministry of Information abandoned its early film policy of tentatively employing a few threadbare fictional themes and turned to its task of using the full powers of the medium.

*D.N.L.* continued to advocate forward-looking policies, the planning of films and programmes of films into an integrated pattern which would give validity and meaning to the post-war democratic world as well as assist in the waging of the day-to-day battle. And now, with the documentary film moving forward into its peacetime phase, the Editorial Board of *D.N.L.* feels that the time has come for the paper to reach a wider circle of readers. As a result of the war documentary films have come to be accepted by large numbers of cinemagoers and are regarded by most teachers, industrialists, civil servants and scientists as part of their future professional pattern of activity. To readers of all five types—the cinemagoer, the scientist, the teacher, the civil servant and the industrialist—*D.N.L.* in its new form will seek to appeal, believing that they will find common ground in the discussion of the relationship between the film and the problems and tasks of these difficult days.

Commercial developments in the documentary field which have lately resulted in the production of such outstanding films as *Theirs is the Glory* and *The Way We Live* may in some quarters be held to demonstrate that documentary has now been accepted by the film industry as a necessary and permanent part of its commercial activity, that the voice crying in the wilderness has made the wilderness blossom as the rose and may well now remain silent and enjoy its achievement. We do not agree. The easier it becomes to make and distribute documentary films the more danger there is that they will become facile in manner and empty of ideas, and against such dangers *D.N.L.* will be vigilant.

Members of the Board have lately visited each of the five continents in the course of their production activities and everywhere they have found an appetite for knowledge of the factual film. In the United States, Canada, Australia, France, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, India, Burma and Malaya plans are under discussion or in operation for the wide use of the film of fact for information and instruction. *Documentary News Letter* will seek to keep readers in these countries informed of what goes on in the world of documentary beyond their shores; and it will welcome news of their own contributions to documentary development.

# DOCUMENTARY GOES TO TOWN

For fifteen years the ugly duckling of the cinema world, the social documentary has now become "box-office". Most people have noticed the increase in the number of studio-produced films with a markedly sociological flavour in their setting or story. They have grown accustomed also to seeing in the cinema, albeit infrequently, short films on social organisation made in obedience to the needs of wartime public information. These are not to be confused with the realistic combat films—documentaries like *Target for Tonight*, *Desert Victory*, *True Glory* and—recently—*Theirs is the Glory*. The factual story of these films was already high-drama, presenting little box-office problem provided the technical execution was credible and of high quality. No, the point for comment is that films which tackle a serious social problem now excite public interest.

Following the wide box-office success of *World of Plenty* another film has recently thrown this development into greater prominence. *The Way We Live* has made its mark partly because, as even all the critics are agreed, it is a good film. The film has a story—or rather two stories; it follows the day-to-day life of a Plymouth family—father, mother and three daughters—in their search for a decent home. The second story, intertwined neatly with the first, is that of a journalist in search of material on "town-planning".

Why does this film in particular spotlight this new development, the intrusion of serious subject-matter on to the entertainment screens of Britain? Let's deal with less important, yet valid, reasons first. There was a certain amount of "build-up" publicity while the film was in production; it was well handled, some of it coming through the pages of *Picture Post*. Secondly, the film critics got on to a rumour that the film was not going to be distributed. Baseless or no, they took no chance and demanded to see it. They liked the film and said it was a disgrace to the trade if it were not shown. This adventitious publicity brought the film well in the public eye. Thirdly, it was made by a young woman, Jill Craigie, whose second film-direction job it was.

### A Commercial Venture

What is of real interest, however, about this latest flight of documentary on to the starry screen, is that it was made within commercial terms of reference; it came from the studio world, from technicians and finance hitherto outside the documentary group. And it was intended—presumably—that it should bring back cash from the box-office. Most previous documentary films which have been theatrically released have been made under outside sponsorship, that is to say, the production unit had a contract for making a given film for some organisation, Government or commercial group, interested in getting a film story told about its place in the social scheme. Such a film as this, for example, might well have been paid for by Plymouth City Council. But in this case it was paid for by Mr. Rank. Moreover most such documentary films have relied upon part of their screen space coming eventually from non-theatrical release; there—whether or no they were a box-office success and got entertainment screen space—they would have a chance of putting over their message to audiences who came more for instruction than entertainment. How does this studio-made, studio-financed documentary trim its sails to make the box-office harbour? Or does it alter its entire rig in the attempt?

About it there is, first, a general impression of lightness, hitherto not often linked with the documentary style. The film doesn't have at you with a social message. Just when it seems an audience of Plymouth citizens is going to play its serious democratic role and listen to a film-illustrated lecture by Professor Abercrombie, we come upon an old man snoring; a little later upon the whispered question, unexpected but human, "When do the blooming pubs open?" These people voice any resentment the audience may feel at being tricked into having a lecture; yet they also make prominent the *attentiveness* of *most* of the lecture audience.

Secondly, its inspiration comes from being shot where the people live. This helps to ensure its validity as a social documentary. (Though we have called the film "studio-made", this is not to imply that it was *shot* in a film studio. It was, however, financed, and the organisational aspects of its making were handled, as for a studio-type film.)

Particular interest centres on Abercrombie's lecture for (as in *The Forgotten Village*) the technique of "film within film" is used to put across serious information—or at all events to conjure up feelings well-disposed to serious information; this within the framework of a story which sets out to give, not a factual, so much as a warm and human picture of its subject.

### Fact or Feeling?

Typical of the film's style is the sequence which pictures one of the social problems besetting the inadequately housed. The second daughter of the family of the story is a rather flighty young girl, beginning to assert herself with the precocity of adolescence. Her two main interests—unendearing, but perhaps apt for an audience in entertainment mood—are her appearance, and boys. Going out to Plymouth Hoe to meet her girl friend, because there is no scope near "home" for her leisure needs, she arrives a little early. While the couples dance in the open air, she waits alone. She has, of course, the opportunity of refusing a "conventional" approach from a British sailor, but is effectively picked up by an American. Her inner thoughts and reactions to the situation came over thought-whispered monologue: "I really shouldn't; but he is good looking. Hope none of mother's friends are watching us; and he dances well." Now this is one way of putting over the social message of *Pick-up Girl*. It is the opposite of the statistical method—"67 per cent of cases of juveniles brought before the magistrates in Blackhampton were from areas where the average habitation density was 2·6 persons per room". The latter method gives us facts we can handle; the former gives us a feeling about the things these facts mean—and because they then impinge upon us deeply, they create the will to *do* something about it. But we don't know *what* to do until we have facts. So for completeness both styles of presenting the message should be used. If *The Way We Live* had been able to cope with both styles it would have been a masterpiece. It is in fact a very good film.

For it and for the others which are coming in future years, the hard spade work of the old hands of the documentary school must have credit. Their efforts—theatrical successes like *Night Mail*, *North Sea*, *The Harvest Shall Come*, *World of Plenty*, *Western Approaches*—at breaking down the distributors' apathy and prejudice helped to familiarise the cinema public with the documentary idea and thus laid the foundations. Building upon these, Jill Craigie and her team have produced a praiseworthy film which will probably go a little further in getting home to an entertainment audience. And let us not forget the money (a cost four times that of a "normal" documentary of equivalent length is quoted) and the enterprise which fostered it. Credit to J. Arthur Rank.

Optimists have in earlier years seen evidence that the trade might be taking its public responsibilities, as well as its box-office returns, in serious vein; it proved slender evidence. But any new flicker of interest in this direction is to be welcomed. Documentary is going to town. But make no mistake—it has not got there yet!

# PERSPECTIVE

THE word documentary, like the words Communism, Miner, Planning, Proust or Chinese Food, raises very mixed emotions in people's minds. To some it is a holy word to be spoken in the sort of voice reserved for visiting the sick or attending the funerals of unloved relatives. To others it is a word for hissing. It is odd, that after eighteen years such a very ordinary utilitarian word can still arouse such passions. Not only important but quite surprising in view of the fact that scarcely anybody knows what it means.

It has been defined often enough both by the documentary film makers and by their friends—and enemies—in other spheres of interest. But definitions have a habit of missing the full implication of the meaning: even the famous "creative treatment of actuality" was only true of certain documentaries at a certain time. It is perhaps this factor of change and growth in the meaning of the word that has caused the trouble. You can pack a lot of history into eighteen years; looking back the picture becomes a good deal clearer.

### The Basis

The basis of the documentary thesis as developed in the late twenties was that the structure of Western civilisation had become so complex that ordinary people found themselves ill-adapted to understand the issues of the day and their own position and responsibility in relation to these issues. Democracy was in danger of collapse, because its citizens did not know how to make it work. The weakness, therefore, was essentially in the realm of public education and information. The vast possibilities of the new mass media (including the then rapidly developing radio) had not been spotted as the key to the problem. Film, because of its obvious mass popularity, and the vividness of the visual image, which, incidentally, remains, despite sound, the essential *lingua franca*, was an obvious choice as a medium in which to put the theory into practice.

It is significant that the opportunity arose from a specific national need—Britain's trade problem in the twenties and the international relations which went with it. A new conception of Empire was being forced on Whitehall. The formation of the Empire Marketing Board in 1926, with Sir Stephen Tallents as Secretary, was in part a reflection of the failure of successive British governments to elucidate the facts and responsibilities of Empire to the British people. Thus, while the word "marketing" provided terms of reference which were apparently narrow, the fact was that to revivify the hardening arteries of trade it was necessary to achieve a new consciousness among ordinary people in Britain and overseas.

### "Bringing Alive"

During its all too brief life, the EMB succeeded in planning for the first time the co-ordination of mass media for the purposes of public information. The policy was to "bring alive" to the people at large the facts and implications of the Commonwealth structure. "Bringing alive" became an important slogan, for it meant that the information given had to be related closely to the experience of ordinary people. It had to give them a sense of participation in the Commonwealth. Abstractions were useless. What was needed was to give an excitement and vividness to the ordinary realities of day-to-day life and activity: to give, for instance, to the farm worker a sense of his close relationship with the town people who depended on his products for their breakfasts, and vice versa.

Under Tallents, the EMB developed a number of techniques. Local exhibitions were opened in provincial cities, particularly in the great manufacturing areas. These were always in the main shopping area, very often in an empty store, and usually included a cinema. Widespread poster campaigns were run, and in these the new conception of participation was indicated by the abandonment of such cold symbols as the angular Wembley lion and the adoption of the vivid figure of a British steelworker. More importantly still, the EMB established a large number of three-panelled permanent poster boards in towns and cities all over the British Isles. These were used largely to increase public consciousness and knowledge of Commonwealth affairs. The posters on these boards were designed by noted artists and became, in a sense, public picture galleries.

Both the ideology and style of EMB activities stemmed largely from the collaboration between Tallents and John Grierson, and in most respects, the work of Grierson's documentary film group within the EMB acted as a pacemaker. From the experiments and activities of the film unit came new conceptions of spreading information.

### Specialisation

It was in the development of different types of films for different audience, and especially in gaining access to people outside the public cinemas, that the important distinction between background and foreground information first became clear. This was to become a vital principle in the development of the educational function of the documentary film.

The limitation of screen time available in public cinemas made it essential to find other means by which the EMB films could reach a sufficiently large cross-section of the community to make their production worth while. The institution of non-theatrical free road-shows, and of the EMB free lending library of films, provided for the needs (then hardly assessed) of both child and adult audiences. Later on, the experience gained by Grierson and his colleagues from studying the reactions of schoolchildren to their films led to the realisation that the purpose of the documentary film did not rest in the selection and treatment of the subject-matter alone, but that for any given subject it would usually be necessary to provide several films differing in perspective. Hence the formulation at this time of the foreground and background distinction. Over-simplified, this distinction is that foreground information deals with the specific, while background information deals with the more general scene in relation to which the specific is taking place. The problem of relating the background Commonwealth story to the specific day-to-day informational jobs was not, in fact, fully solved, owing largely to the overall failure in education about the Commonwealth, which was, and still is, one of the most sensational vacancies in the mental and spiritual make-up of the British electorate. More, perhaps, might have been achieved had not the EMB been abolished, with the result that its embryo information services were transferred to the GPO.

### Public Relations

At the GPO, Tallents, Grierson, and the documentary group faced a new and urgent task. A new phrase—Public Relations—was taken into the documentary field. The Post Offices of Britain were a byword for inefficiency, gloominess and a general old-fashioned atmosphere. They were the front by which the public judged the Post Office, and they effectually concealed a hundred and one superbly efficient jobs. A physical job of rebuilding, such as was undertaken at the time, was not a sufficient solution. Behind it all was the question of the morale of the Post Office staff as a whole. The first terms of reference of the GPO Film Unit were, then, to provide for the staff an understanding of their individual relations to the over-all ramifications of GPO activities, to explain organisation as a whole, and to relate department to department in an exciting and imaginative manner. The first films made by the GPO Film Unit achieved something over and beyond their purpose. They were

(*continued on page* 60)

# NOTES OF THE MONTH

### F.A.O. and Films

THE first sentence of the first article of the Constitution of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations reads: "The Organisation shall collect, analyse, interpret, and disseminate information relating to nutrition, food and agriculture." Yet the Copenhagen conference could find no space officially for the discussion of how this could best be done, though a number of people agreed that the best plans on earth, and the best machines and the best science, are helpless without the understanding and co-operation of the great multitudes of mankind. Always excepting Sir John Orr and La Guardia, most of the delegates seemed to think only in terms of abstract organisation or detailed scientific process. Any question of the ordinary people being considered as part of the agricultural process would have seemed an intrusion to them. In fact, it looks as if the first task of F.A.O. may well be to collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate information to its own members and the governments they represent.

Not that films were absent. They were there in profusion. About 70 were sent in by Australia, Canada, U.S.A., England, Denmark and France. A conference committee consisting of Florence Reynolds, Mogens Skot-Hansen and Arthur Elton was at work a fortnight before the conference opened. The first week of the conference was devoted mainly to general shows of films, and the opportunity was taken to organise a series of showings to Danish audiences. These included batches of high-school students, teachers and students from agricultural colleges, trades unions, women's organisations, and other such groups. There were also a few general shows for delegates, and the excellently equipped conference cinema was running from morning to night, Saturdays and Sundays included.

There is no doubt that this series of shows created a great interest in the use of the film among Danish groups who have so far had little opportunity to examine the films and methods of other countries. Nevertheless, these shows did not perform the essential task of assisting delegates. Unfortunately, it had not been found possible to relate specific films to specific parts of the agenda in advance, partly because most of the films arrived very late, usually unaccompanied by dope sheets (the important British batch from the C.O.I. did not arrive till after the conference opened) and partly because the agenda of the conference was often not settled till just before the meetings were due to be held. In order to reach the delegates, it was decided to issue, at the end of the first week, an annotated catalogue of all the films held, and to offer projection facilities to run any film at any place required, either in a conference room, in the main theatre, or even in a delegate's hotel. In this way the delegates were able to select films and programmes for examination according to their particular interests. This plan was a great success, and represents an important development in the use of the film at conferences. Ideally the catalogue should have been prepared before the conference started, instead of half-way through, but since America was the only country to send films in advance, this was not possible.

### Catch 'em Young

EARLIER this year we reprinted an article from *The Times* dealing with the Saturday morning shows for children. The nature and suitability of these shows is still a matter of considerable public concern. In April of this year a conference on "Children and the Cinema" was called by the National Council of Women and the British Film Institute, the proceedings of which have just been issued in printed form by the Film Institute.

This report confirms the misgivings experienced by many people who have studied the development of clubs run under the auspices of the great commercial circuits. Despite the efforts of speakers put up to defend the clubs it is patently clear from the report that the majority of people present found their criticisms of all aspects of the Saturday shows confirmed as the conference developed. No amount of whitewashing could conceal the fact that the shows are run without the guidance of trained people. The children are subjected to various types of mass hysteria and to a very dubious ideology. ("We're the boys of the Odeon, we're thousands strong we can't be wrong.") Psychologists vied with teachers and parents in condemnation of the whole set-up.

Even the films shown could hardly be called unexceptionable. The "representative" group shown at the Conference were trashy, artistically and socially. Yet, as it became clear, the revenue from these clubs is substantial, and the indirect return, viewed in terms of the inculcation of the cinema-going habit, considerable.

The Conference clearly marked a new stage in the expression of public disquiet about the way these clubs are run. It can be argued that they serve a socially useful purpose in keeping the children off the streets on Saturday mornings. But this must be set against the insidious damage to their minds which may result from the present club procedure.

### The Film Societies

DESPITE all the dislocations of the war years, the film society movement has survived. Indeed, there is today a greater demand than ever for the various services which this movement can provide. Last year the New London Film Society started up with a series of Sunday programmes at the Scala, and the demand for seats exceeded all expectations. By providing a number of shows of screen classics from all countries, this Society enabled many people to achieve for the first time a perspective on cinema. This season its activities are being renewed, first with a festival of French films, together with an exhibition sent over from Paris by the Cinemathèque Française, and secondly with twelve programmes of great American films, including, *Anna Christie*, *The Wind*, *The General*, *Foolish Wives*, *Orphans of the Storm* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

Parallel with this opportunity to study the development of film art is the equally important opportunity to study and discuss the part played by the cinema in the social and technological problems of the day. Since its inception before the war, the Scientific Film Society movement has gained ever increasing momentum, the layman as well as the specialist evincing a keen desire to enjoy filmic analysis and discussion on all levels. The London Scientific Film Society has announced a ten months' programme, beginning in October, of scientific and documentary films. Its further activities will include special shows of research films, lectures, children's shows, and the publication of a quarterly journal. Plans are also announced for the production of experimental films by a group of members, the expressed aim being to use the film as a scientific tool "rather than in its more usual function as a medium of pictorial presentation".

Add to the work of these societies the renewed activities of similar groups in the provinces, to say nothing of the summer schools, such as those organised each summer by the Workers' Film Association, and it will be realised that the film society movement in this country is a force to be reckoned with.

# WARTIME WEDDING

## by John Shearman

**John Shearman, a documentary film director, was during the war a member of the R.A.F. Film Unit. He found himself working alongside both feature film and documentary film technicians and he had consequently a special opportunity of observing the interaction of the two film forms**

THERE seems no doubt that the British feature film has made one of those magnificent leaps forward and upward which play an important part in the development of all art forms. One of the many forces behind that leap was the pre-war development of British documentary.

The great period of true documentary was before the war. *Drifters*, *Song of Ceylon*, *Shipyard*, *Night Mail* . . . the classics of documentary were the revolutionary products of the nineteen thirties. At that time a good many people looked at them with suspicion—not unusual with revolutionary art.

The true documentary continued into the first years of the war. *Men of the Lightship*, *Coastal Command*, *Fires Were Started*, *Ack-Ack* . . . they were in the straight line of descent from *Night Mail* and *North Sea*. But nobody now was suspicious of them. It had suddenly become immensely important to depict how a small group of people, typical of many such groups, behaved in actual circumstances, circumstances of the greatest and most urgent reality. The war demanded (*inter alia*) documentary. The revolutionary, suspect, foundling child of the film industry was suddenly welcomed into the very best society and became a part of the mental life of the people.

At about the same time feature film makers in this country found themselves caught by a strange emotion. They wanted to say something sincere about people at war.

### Getting Together

The two groups, feature and documentary film makers, had spent the pre-war years sniffing haughtily at each other ("Say what you like, it's not box-office", and "But it's nothing to do with real life".) Now, with the coming of war, they stopped sniffing and began to get something from each other. Documentary directors found that they needed the technical resources of the studio in order to make their films big enough to match the giant size of their subject—war. Feature film makers found themselves wanting to leave behind the fantasy-life of the popular film and turn to a life which was a good deal closer to reality: a fusion of techniques was inevitable. Other causes operated towards the same end. Documentary and feature technicians found themselves working together in the Service Units. A great documentary unit was accommodated in a requisitioned feature studio along with the R.A.F. and Army film units. The authorities (the great "They") wanted films for specific purposes, and entrusted the making of them to both groups.

Thus feature films began to acquire a flavour of the documentary—*The Foreman Went to France*, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, *Forty-Ninth Parallel*, *Next of Kin*. The effect of this infiltration of the documentary idea can now be traced in most of the great British features made during and just after the war—*In Which We Serve*, *San Demetrio London*, *The Way Ahead*, *Canterbury Tale*, and, outstandingly, in *Journey Together*. After the first show of this film (before its West End opening) a group of feature technicians wandered out of the theatre saying, "Of course, it's pure documentary." They were closely followed by a group of documentary technicians saying, "Of course, it's a pure feature." This was in 1945. A fusion between feature and documentary techniques and ways of thought had taken place.

### The Use of Sound

The feature film makers were not the only ones affected. Something had happened to documentary film makers, too. Documentary is more than just a special technique of making short films with picture and commentary. Documentary is an idea. But it is true to say that before the war documentaries generally were short and had little or no synchronised dialogue. If documentaries get longer and use more synchronised dialogue, they become more like features. Both these things happened to documentaries during the war. They became longer because there was more to say. Why did they tend towards more synchronised dialogue?

For a number of reasons. Because, granted greater length, commentary alone was no longer adequately gripping. Because dialogue does in fact take place in the real-life equivalents to documentary situations. Because the best way to show a man giving orders (for example) is, quite simply, to show a man giving orders. Because the specialised jargon of the bomber and the gun site has its own artistic value.

For documentary film makers the need for synchronised sound brought its own practical problems. It is axiomatic that sound on location is hell. Documentary, therefore, had to go into the studio to a greater extent than had been its habit. Fortunately it managed to do so without becoming studio-bound and losing reality.

There were problems, too, for documentary writers. Dialogue must, on the whole, be written before it is shot. It must say, or imply, what has to be said or implied, yet it must be as near as possible to what would in fact be said, though it must be tighter than normal speech, and less profane. Writing it, then, is an expert job.

### The Actor

A still greater problem confronted the director of this type of film. He could, with a reasonable hope of success, film a non-actor doing something. He could not, except in special circumstances, get a non-actor to speak dialogue. With the best will in the world on everybody's part, a non-actor speaking lines usually creaks a bit. There are, of course, shining examples to the contrary, and routine stuff—"Contact", "Left, left . . . steady . . . bombs gone", and the like can be perfectly satisfactory. But to ask more than that is to ask an amateur to do something for which professionals train and study during their whole working lives. The result, generally speaking, is bad. Sometimes it is unspeakably bad; sometimes there is but the vaguest suspicion that something is not quite right.

That was the problem. The immediate tendency was for documentary directors to use a professional actor now and again—not at all for his or her star-value, but simply because he did the job best. But not all professional actors did the job best. Stagey dialogue and action are as bad (in documentary) as creaky dialogue and action. The professional actor with a tradition of stage and feature work only is not the final answer.

### Contact

So the two pre-war worlds of feature and documentary have, during the war, made contact. *Western Approaches* is perhaps the perfect example of the feature-like documentary. It is of feature length; it is made in Technicolor, that spoilt darling of the studios; it uses no commentary. But it was made by a documentary unit under documentary conditions. No professional actor played in it. Synchronised sound, Technicolor camera, cast and technicians went to sea in the real Atlantic, not in a tank or before a back projection screen. Is it feature? Is it documentary? Or is it, like *Journey Together*, some new fusion of both schools?

### Common Ground

The two films, *Western Approaches* and *Journey Together* are an instructive comparison for, starting from opposite poles, they have arrived on common ground. In *Journey Together*, script and direction, photography and recording were carried out by people with a feature, not a documentary, training and background. Almost every part was played by a professional actor. In production the technical resources of the studio were fully and admirably employed. Back projection, model shots, tanks and so forth were used freely and fully. The editing was by a feature editor.

What is the common element in these two films which sprang from such different beginnings? It is, perhaps, that in both these films and the many others like them, real-seeming circumstances surround a small group of real-seeming people whom we get to know individually and with whom we identify ourselves to a greater or less extent. They are symbols of many people to whom similar important events are happening.

# DOCUMENTARY FILM REVIEWS

**Factors of Soil Fertility.** *Production:* Realist Film Unit in association with Film Centre for I.C.I. *Director:* Brian Smith. *Photography:* Cyril Phillips. 22 mins.

**Soil Nutrients.** *Production:* Realist Film Unit in association with Film Centre for I.C.I. *Director:* Brian Smith. *Photography:* Cyril Phillips. 19 mins.

**Liming.** *Production:* Realist Film Unit in association with Film Centre for I.C.I. *Director*: Brian Smith. *Photography:* Cyril Phillips. 12 mins.

**Land Drainage.** *Production:* Realist Film Unit in association with Film Centre for I.C.I. *Director:* Brian Smith. *Photography:* Cyril Phillips. 23 mins.

ON THE face of it the soil would seem to be one of the most unpromising subjects to make films about; and a good deal of credit is due to the ingenuity which has made this subject come alive.

*Factors of Soil Fertility.* The first film as the name implies, states the main principles of soil fertility—air and moisture for the roots, provision of a balanced diet, correction of acidity by liming, prevention of disease. It points out that the crop will be as good as the worst of these factors will allow, and by a neat use of diagram, and of speeded-up crop samples the film interprets the logic that lies behind normal farming practice. It thus sets the stage for the other three films which deal in more detail with each of the main factors of soil fertility.

*Soil Nutrients.* The soil is all the time becoming deficient in plant foods, due to the repeated removal of crops, or to the grazing of animals. These deficiencies must be made up, either by "natural methods", such as dunging, green manuring, or the scattering of bone meal; or by the addition of artificial fertilisers. A balance must at all times be maintained and the advantages of soil analysis are stressed.

*Liming.* This is a straightforward propaganda film for the use of lime when the soil needs it. It shows some of the sources of lime—chalk and carboniferous sand—the need for soil analysis in assessing the lime requirements of soil and the methods of applying it.

*Land Drainage.* To a layman, this is the most interesting film of the series. By means of excellent diagrams we are shown a typical catchment area with its surface drainage of streams and its underground water table. In keeping his land well drained, the farmer has to pin down the water table wherever it is likely to rise up to the surface of the land, that is, wherever it wells up to form springs when it meets impermeable rock, and when it rises to the surface in wet weather. The farmer does this by ditching, and by subsidiary mole or tile draining.

Apart from their logical exposition, what is pleasant about these four films is the feeling of sympathy they have for the farmer's day-to-day problems—the weather, labour difficulties, etc. One never has the feeling, as in so many films of the kind, that here is a council of perfection, difficult to attain. Brian Smith's own particular brand of dry humour also give the films an added lift, though one could wish the commentator had had a lighter touch. Indeed the voice of the commentator is the weakest part of these films. Under the thin disguise of a countryman's voice he still contrived to put technical agricultural terms into inverted commas. This is a familiar problem in all technical films, and it would seem to be almost better to forgo the polish of the professional commentator in favour of the knowledgeable voice of the man who does the job.

**United Harvest.** *Production*: Greenpark, in association with Film Centre, for the National Farmers Union. *Director*: Ralph Keene. *Photography*: George Still. *Editor*: Peter Scott. *Distribution*: G.F.D. 17 mins.

*United Harvest* pleads a just cause. It argues that the world's production and distribution of food should be planned on the international scale in the same way that British agriculture was planned on a national scale during the war years, and that there should be a greater understanding and co-operation between industry and agriculture.

The argument is fine but unfortunately the method of putting it across is not so happy. In attempting to tell a complicated story of this sort in terms of dialogue the producers have landed themselves with a lot of very forced conversation, much of which is merely commentary. The result of putting commentary argument into the mouth of a character destroys both the characterisation and the flow of ideas. It seems a pity that the film was not given a more straightforward treatment, with undisguised commentary instead of forcing it into a supposedly popular but most unsuitable form. All the more so, as several sequences, in the train on the Continent and in the factory canteen, show considerable skill and imagination. No doubt the film's producers will maintain that their style of treatment is to some extent justified by the wide theatrical distribution which the film is said to be achieving.

**Today and Tomorrow.** *Production*: World Wide for C.O.I. *Producer*: Ralph Bond. *Associate Producer*: Arthur Elton. *Director*: Robin Carruthers. *Photography*: Clifford Hornby. 40 mins.

*Today and Tomorrow* is a good film which only just misses being very good indeed. It is concerned with the impact of the war on the precarious economy of the Middle East and explains the methods by which the Allies averted a major famine in the face of the German Army and the German propaganda machine. It shows how these same methods may help to put the countries of the Middle East on a firmer footing in the future and at the same time help solve the wider problem of the food crisis which now faces the whole world.

In common with so many documentaries with their tendency to open on the Creation, skip gaily down the centuries, describe and analyse the contemporary scene and conclude with a rosy estimate of the future, this film tries to crowd rather too much into its forty odd minutes and ends on a note of optimism based on rather slender evidence.

It is extremely well directed and photographed and throughout there is a deep feeling of humanity for the peoples of the Middle East. A number of sequences notably the locust scenes, the story of the donkey, the first water coming down the canal and the beautiful sequence of the schoolmaster and the children planting young trees on the barren hillside, are excellent in themselves, but it is perhaps the changes in treatment (instructional, reportage, idyllic by turns) that together with an over-wide subject make this film not quite as good as one feels it might have been. It remains both interesting and moving.

**Approach to Science.** *Production*: Shell Film Unit for A.B.C.A. *Producers*: Geoffrey Bell and Edgar Anstey. *Director*: Bill Mason. *Photography*: Sidney Beadle. *Music*: William Alwyn. *Diagrams*: Frank Rodker and A. Shaw. *Distribution* A.B.C.A. Non-T. 28 mins.

A brief survey of a few fields in which science affects our daily life. The introduction contrasts the power of science to create and to destroy. The development of the modern trolley-bus and turbo-generator is traced historically through Volta, Oersted, Sturgeon, and Faraday. The sampling and testing of town water supplies, and the hand fertilisation of wheat at an Agricultural Research station are shown. The principles of Radar and of the cathode ray oscillograph are explained, Next, the applications of mass radiography and statistical methods to the problem of tuberculosis, and finally a glimpse of child psychology to represent the social sciences.

The film will be shown to all ranks of all troops. The object of the film is to pose questions for discussion rather than supply didactic answers.

The approach to science is through thirty bars of music, not the sinister stuff that usually accompanies film scientists at work but why music at all? In general the film is a straightforward account of a few aspects of scientific method. The topics are well chosen and well linked together, and it is clear that considerable thought has been given to accuracy. The historical sequence is discreetly done and there are no mystical dancing molecules and apparatus-packed laboratories which were a regrettable feature of "Handle with Care". Radar is explained by analogy with sound waves, but it was a mistake to attempt to put across the complexities of the cathode ray oscillograph in a film of this type.

In spite of linking science with everyday life one still gets the impression: Science is Doing-something-with-special-apparatus, and here are our scientists and non-scientists in water-tight compartments. It should have been made clear that science is an attitude of mind and method of approach, not merely a technique to be acquired. However, it was a good point to end with the commentator's question: "How can each one of us become his own scientist?" followed by a sequence in a public library, and the film should achieve its object of starting discussion.

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# SOCIETY, SCIENCE AND MOVIE

## by a Psychiatrist

ONE OF the more unexpected results of the war was the discovery by psychologists and psychiatrists that in order to get anywhere in the social science field, they could no longer work in glorious isolation, but would have to collaborate with those concerned with specific problems. A second, and perhaps more unexpected result was the mutual discovery by these specialists and some of the documentary film makers that they possessed in common the desire to present to the world knowledge about human problems, as their conscious contribution to social progress. This discovery resulted from the collaboration between the Army psychologists and psychiatrists, the Directorate of Army Kinematography and the Ministry of Information on such films as *Personnel Selection—Recruits*, *Personnel Selection—Officers*, *The New Lot* (out of which was born *The Way Ahead*) and various films on morale and war psychiatry. The Army group who collaborated in these film ventures now form the core of the newly created Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. They are anxious that the collaboration with film makers, achieved during the war, may be continued.

It may be thought unusual that a group of specialists studying the deep recesses of the mind should seek to collaborate with such groups as documentary film makers. However, the trend in social science is towards dealing with problems in active relationship with other groups concerned with similar problems. In so far, then, as documentary films attempt to portray living human beings and their problems they will secure the warm support of the psychiatrist and social scientist. It is in this light that the Tavistock Institute recognises in the documentary film a powerful ally in presenting to the public social problems and tentative solutions. It is likely, too, that these specialists may be of assistance to the documentary film maker, not only by providing technical advice and assistance, but also by bringing to his notice the wealth of human material obtained through the study and treatment of real people and communities.

Before discussing some of the fields of work of the Institute applicable to documentary problems, it will be useful to indicate some of the roots from which the new organisation has grown.

### The Development of the Institute

Early in the war, psychiatrists began their work in the Army by treating individuals, officers and men, who had developed a variety of disturbances owing to the strains of the new situations in which they found themselves, and the new demands made upon them. Further than this, the psychiatrists hoped in time to be able to prevent psychological disturbances from arising at all. As a result, several of them found themselves more and more concerned with questions of the general well-being of groups within the Army. That is to say, they tended to become "social psychiatrists", or "sociatrists". In its turn, this outlook led to the development of selection procedures for both officers and men. From it arose, too, a new approach to battle conditioning, battle training and tactics, new methods in psychological warfare, both in military intelligence and in broadcasting, and new techniques for solving problems of repatriation and resettlement. In addition, practical contributions were made to the assessment and maintenance of morale and discipline.

While the work done in the Army necessarily had many features that were specific to the military group, many aspects were obviously of a general nature in their application to the welfare of all kinds of groups. In particular, Army experience seemed peculiarly applicable to many of the practical problems of social reconstruction. As a result of requests from many civilian bodies, it became clear that some sort of civilian organisation was called for. So it was that the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations was established, with the assistance of the Rockefeller Foundation. It is the goal of this group eventually to become self-supporting on the basis of practical work done for the community.

Many of the problems with which the Institute will be concerned are in line with problems treated by documentary film makers. In general these problems may be described as the study of human relationships within industrial, cultural and family groups. For the want of a better word, the term "sociatry" has been used to designate this field of work. It is intended to include all aspects of the treatment of group or social problems, and in this sense the psychiatrist and documentary film maker are equally "social doctors" or "sociatrists".

### "Sociatry" and Documentary

The practice of sociatry came originally from the group treatment of neurotic patients. The group discussion techniques used in this field were found to be applicable to many other kinds of group. They have been applied to such varied purposes as officer selection and current affairs discussions. From the study of these varied applications of group methods is rapidly emerging a new and better understanding of the structure, development and requirements for smooth working of groups in general. It is possible that the results may be applicable to the problems of group discussions in relation to films.

There are, however, other more general applications of group techniques to problems which, because of widespread public interest, may interest the documentary film maker. One such is the increasing public interest in the family aroused by the widespread family resettlement problem, the changing status of women and mothers, and anxiety over the birthrate. Here we would attempt to treat the family as a group in relation to the rest of the community, rather than dealing with, say, an anxious mother or a delinquent child in isolation. Another example is that of assisting in raising the productive efficiency of industry through the establishment of smooth working human relationships. Here group techniques can be applied, for example, to the removal of emotional stresses due say to poor foreman-worker relations, or to the eliciting of information concerning the attitude of workers in a particular industry to the rest of the country —a problem which apparently applies to the coal mining industry today.

Another field in which the study of human relations is of value is in the study of culture patterns. This was begun during the war through the study of various aspects of the morale and psychological structure of the German Wehrmacht. This resulted, among other things, in the definition of an authoritarian personality type corollated with Nazi ideology, perhaps defining the prototype of the potential Fascist in our own midst. The method used in this study provides a possible link between intimate personality study of political attitudes, and group dynamics. It is intended to continue these studies in relation to such problems as the domestic behaviour of parents and the personality development of their children, and the effects of stresses resulting from the influence of authoritarian characters in key positions in industry and other groups.

Some of the above problems may perhaps lend themselves in one way or another to film treatment. Also the general sociatric approach may be of value in giving a flavour or orientation to some particular film. This, however, raises the question of the methods by which collaboration between the specialist in human relations and the documentary film maker can be achieved. Tentative beginnings might be made along the lines of uncovering problems requiring urgent film treatment, discussion about actual scripts, technical consultation on the film treatment of specific problems, and discussions concerning the psychological aspects of film content in order to assist director and actor towards a more penetrating analysis of underlying themes.

### Film Research

In addition to collaboration between the specialist and documentary film producer in attacking common problems along the lines suggested above, the Institute is deeply interested in one other project which is equally of concern to the documentary film maker—that of fundamental research into the psychological mechanisms underlying the effect which the film has on the audience. Initial research by other workers in the field has already fortified the intuitive knowledge that the film in fact does *something* to the audience and has even to a certain extent revealed *what* the film is capable of doing. But there still remains the deeper question of *how* the film operates on the audience—the dynamics of the interplay between the film and the observer.

It must be admitted that some of the film research conducted by psychologists in the past has suffered from an academic quality, due, perhaps, to its being carried out with too little regard for practical problems. The Institute would hope,

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# GRIERSON TAKES STOCK

## Address by John Grierson to New York Film Council

BEFORE I go on to indicate the opportunities and the responsibilities of the documentary film in the United States I think it would be well to indicate the position reached in two allied countries: Canada and the United Kingdom. In the U.K., in contrast to the United States, there is no public discussion nor even public thought of giving up the government information service. What has happened there is that the wartime Ministry of Information has been disbanded and in its place there is a Central Office of Information to provide all the departments of government with the supply of films, exhibitions, posters and publications that they require.

One significant point in the British scene is the wide knowledge and recognition by Government Ministers of the work which the documentary film has done over the past fifteen years. I have been long associated with Ministerial interests in information, but I have never known a time or an occasion when senior Ministers were so intimately aware of the value and necessity of the information media and of the documentary film in particular as men like Sir Stafford Cripps or Mr. Herbert Morrison are today. Much may be expected from this and I have some reason to know that they are not considering the media as media of mere propaganda, but in the best sense as media for the encouragement of public discussion and understanding. One evidence of this is the universal approval of the government's decision to maintain its very intensive system of non-theatrical distribution. This operates on a regional basis and maintains both decentralised libraries and travelling projection units.

What may appear equally important from an American point of view is the possibility and even likelihood of the government developing a central commission for the *total* development of the documentary and educational use of film: that is to say for the development of documentary and educational films in every form, and apart from the information needs of the departments of government. I think it would be worth a side bet to say that an attempt at total national planning in this field will be made within the next year or at most two years. I would not be surprised to see a financial corporation under government auspices devoted to the financing of approved projects both for theatrical and non-theatrical distribution.

I think we must expect some very articulate results from the United Kingdom in the next period. This, of course, is partly due to the present economic position of Britain and its dire need to use every medium of communication in maintaining the spirit of total effort. But it is also due to a spirit of understanding between the government and the media of communication which is not quite paralleled elsewhere. In England today there is not so much talk as you would expect of what is private enterprise and what is public necessity. The main emphasis everywhere is public necessity and it is certainly not least evident in the film trade. Private enterprise, including the Rank interests, is deeply involved in the production of documentary and educational films, yet my impression is that private and public interests both will be freely and easily related in a common desire for national planning.

## NEW DUTIES OF INFORMATION

IN CANADA the situation is somewhat different. I only cite it because it has already become an example to the smaller countries and may be expected to show the way to countries like Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Czechoslovakia and the South American countries, not to mention all the Dominions. There, because of the insufficiency of the home production industry, the government has taken the initiative and set up a very considerable production and distribution service. Last year the Canadian government produced more than three hundred films. It maintained its own National Film Board with a staff of some eight hundred people, but it also did much to encourage the growth of outside independent units. It is important in the Canadian example to note that it provided films of a public information nature on every level of distribution, both theatrical and non-theatrical, and that it maintained a non-theatrical distribution probably more intensive than any in the world. This example is, I think, likely to be followed by the other middle and smaller countries which do not have a highly developed film industry. I think it likely the amount of documentary and newsreel material emanating from governments all over the world will not decrease as some suppose because of the end of the war, but in the future will greatly increase: and that shorts distributors and newsreel distributors everywhere will have an enormous fund of world observation to draw upon.

As to the United States itself, I must repeat that the duties placed upon the documentary and educational film makers and distributors are greater than ever before. Unfortunately there is a gentle sense of something being mixed up at the present moment and it is only because I am an alien that I don't use the word confused. The OWI has gone and the new government policies in the matter of film usage are not yet declared. The relationship between the film industry and the government's information needs are still obscure. In the United States you have not yet arrived at a clear definition of the relationship between private enterprise and public responsibility in the matter of the mass communications, nor specifically have you yet defined where the government's information needs and the interests of the film industry coincide. It appears to the outsider an unnatural and unnecessary estrangement between the two, which must place America at some disadvantage as it communicates with countries with a more unified mind regarding their national responsibilities. But what strikes the outsider most is the fact that with so much in the way of technical skill and brightness of ideas and trained personnel, so relatively little in the totality should emerge so far as the directive use of the film is concerned. The separate efforts may be brilliant but they are not co-ordinated or planned. This is particularly true in distribution, where one could hope that the needs of public education could be more authoritatively and more academically served than they are now by a hundred agencies each pursuing its own opportunist line of development. If there is one field which ought to be indivisible it is the field of education. It suggests something a little more mature than the system we now have: something in the way of a federation: something in the way of professional standards: something in the way of a common effort to a common end.

It seems a greater pity to have disunity among the film makers and film distributors in this field, as we realise the great challenge to the medium which present political circumstances present. New problems of communication beset us as we have to make over our national society and our international society into a truly co-operative society. Economic events are such that interdependence has of necessity to become part and parcel of our imaginations. Every international headline today calls for a measure of dramatic elucidation which will reach to the smallest hamlet and the furthest farm. The formation of UNO and all its instruments—social, economic, cultural, scientific, labour and educational—implies in each country a *duty* to put the instruments of communication at the service of its aims and ideals. What it implies is that we must in each country so mobilise our media that we will be able to meet the educational challenge.

It is important that the film should not be behindhand. The capacity of the Press to communicate between nations is vastly increased with the development of radio: so vastly increased that today the cable system is for all practical Press purposes out of date. The broadcasting service has similarly developed spectacular capacities for international communication and will do still more with the development of frequency modulation and facsimile. The publishers and particularly the visual publishers through various new technical devices have it in their hands to spread the popular presentation of public affairs all over the world. These fields are far better organised and far better financed than we are for the purpose. It would be a pity

if America's most vital medium for the international communication of public observation and public comment were to fail because of a piecemeal, scrappy and essentially amateur approach.

Some central organisation of the documentary and educational effort is now necessary, and if I may say so it is now vitally necessary. What form it should take I am not going to attempt to say at this time, but I beg that you will think about it. I see the entertainment industry very properly girding itself for its new responsibilities. I simply say that it is time the documentary and educational film industry did likewise. I am not thinking simply of an association of documentary film individuals such as you have had in the past. I am thinking of a highly ordered federation of units comprising all the production, distribution and equipment interests involved in the wise and responsible development of our medium in the public interest.

## A SIX-POINT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

THERE ARE certainly many fields of work in which we are now deficient and if you will permit me I suggest to you a six-point programme for our better development.

We need to do a whole lot better *with our information services*. The general conception of documentary is not nearly well enough known. The contribution we have to make to education in correlating widely separate events, in giving dramatic shape to wide and disparate areas of observation is not appreciated fully by educationists. The contribution the film has to make in bridging the gap between the classroom and the community, the citizen and the wider economic world on which he depends, has not been sufficiently grasped.

A new generation of teachers has to be developed which will more fully understand the *difference between curriculum pedagogy and the larger work of creating a civic imagination fit for the new co-operative world*. We have today no sufficient system of information by which the Press and the radio will know of our work. We have no sufficient system by which, through lectures and film groups throughout the country, *an orderly understanding and use of the medium is developed*. Since in fact we cannot each of us afford an information service, we need a common one. One important part of that service ought to be a richer interchange of opinions and ideas than we have today. With so many writers and speakers amongst us, it is, I think, disappointing that so little criticism of the first order is written amongst us. There was a time when we used to write for the *Sun* and the *Tribune* and *The Times* and the trade papers and the academic and art magazines. The tradition still lasts I notice in England where the documentary people may have forgotten a lot of things but have not forgotten to do their weekly chore in film writing. It is especially important today to renew this sense of criticism. Much has been learned technically during the war years particularly in the pedagogic field. It should be put down for everyone to learn from. The new technical developments in high-speed communication which must revolutionise the mind—and I hope the manners—of the world are so important that they demand the fullest analysis and appreciation. The relationship between film and the other visual media of presentation now developing in the educational film and particularly in the field of adult education, also calls for the fullest critical understanding.

I wonder, too, if we understand *nearly enough about liaison work* or are sufficiently organised to open up the many fields of sponsorship which lie available to us. Several of the Foundations, including Rockefeller, Sloane and Harmon have already made a contribution in this field, and I hope that International Film Associates may be of some service in this same direction. Certainly we have to understand *now and on* that we cannot simply wait around in our odd corners hoping for films to turn up, without continuity either of production or of industrial security. If we really mean to make a truly national contribution to public information the whole business of sponsorship has to acquire a measure of national planning. I mean by this that somewhere and somehow we have to create a service *which looks creatively into the information needs of government departments*, national associations, cities and industries and *learns* how to relate them to the the public educational needs of the country and the world. This I beg you to believe is not just a salesman's task and it will be a tragedy if it ever becomes just a salesman's task. I have only to cite to you the classical examples of good liaison work in the past to indicate how creative and fruitful a proper approach can be. We have had examples in the past with *the slum clearance and social betterment films made for the fuel companies;* the *medical films done* for the chemical corporations. Similarly during the war the selling of war loan was turned to economic education; the elimination of absenteeism was turned to films on housing and health and labour relations in industrial communities and the improvement of agricultural production standards was turned to a real consideration of the sociology of rural living. It is not just that the possibilities in this liaison field are enormous. *It is in my view crucial that we shall actually organise for them and on some centralised basis if we are to make anything o the documentary opportunity on a national scale*

## NEED FOR A COMMON ORGANISATION

I AM GOING to be blessedly short on the other points. We need a campaign among producers for a better understanding of distribution and the laws of distribution. I hope we can stop for ever a practice, based no doubt on misfortune, under which films are made without any clear system of distribution in mind: where they fall between theatrical and non-theatrical and get neither; where films are too long for either the one or the other, or are not geared to the style of one or the other. We ought all, I think, to know enough now to avoid the mistakes of the thirties in which so much production excitement finished in so much distribution disappointment. I have a notion that there are enough examples in the old and much maligned film industry to indicate how producers and distributors can get together for their mutual benefit.

I hope among other things that *we shall soon be able to develop a proper evaluation service for this wide and complex field of ours*. It is just about time that we knew what has been done in fields like, say, medicine, public health and rural sociology—just about time that we knew what is good and what is bad and where the gaps lie that have to be filled. That task I bequeath to such bodies as the Library of Congress, the American Film Council, the National Board of Review and the Museum of Modern Art. It would be a service to us all of the highest order and not least it would be a service of the highest order to the United Nations.

*We ought similarly to have an orderly liaison service with the entertainment film industry and particularly in respect of newsreel and theatrical shorts*. Our interest is at many points a common interest. We have much to give them and much also to get from them, and in the long run they must represent a level of approach to which we cannot be indifferent. This will be increasingly so as we come to operate for governments and for national interests whose material is without question of public account.

*But, finally, I shall have said my piece if I say that what we need above all is a unified and orderly system of approach to our common problems*. We have been too much disunited in the past. From what I hear we have been too much divided on political issues, professional issues and aesthetic issues and all the rest of it. All I know is that disunited the documentary and educational developments will go on being unfit for the great opportunity that lies before it; and it may be that people with lesser ideas but a better sense of order will swallow it up. I would not be surprised. So far as I am concerned, I have seen great *measures of unity developed elsewhere in a common spirit of endeavour and a common spirit of sacrifice and with a deep underlying notion that education and public purpose are in the end indivisible*. I think it possible that we can make all allowance for the differences of view which make for a vital society *and still achieve that common organisation amongst us which would make something nationally and internationally significant of the medium which we have in our hands and to which I know we are all devoted.*

# MALAYAN ROAD-SHOW

## by a Correspondent

TWENTY-ODD miles from Kuala Lumpur is the township of Klang and it was here that I saw my first mobile cinema at work in Malaya. The show was to be given in an amusement park which is a common feature of Malayan towns. They are a cross between Coney Island and the Glyndebourne Festival. In connection with a War Exhibition the Public Relations Dept. of Malaya had announced a free cinema show in the park grounds and a space had been provided by the delighted Chinese proprietor whose desire to be helpful was not unnaturally mixed with an eye to business. The show was due to commence at 8 p.m. so at 7.30 I made my way through a dense crowd of people, Indian, Chinese, and Malays, with a sprinkling of British troops, towards the cinema site. By dint of much pushing I at last managed to reach the cinema truck, a three-tonner equipped with a 35 mm. projector built inside the van. Drawn up alongside was a public address van with two enormous speakers mounted on top, and about 100 feet away was the screen lashed to bamboo uprights. At the rear of the screen was the fence enclosing the park, one had to look closely to identify it as a fence because of the incredible number of children draped over it. About 2,000 people were gathered in front of the screen looking solemnly at it and entirely oblivious of the indescribable din going on round them. My heart sank a little at the competition we had to face. Within 20 yards on either side of the enclosure were thirty or forty sideshows plus a cabaret and a raised platform upon which Malays were dancing the *rongeng*, a popular Malay dance, accompanied by the appropriate music. Promptly at eight the show started and the opening music of the first film joined the appalling volume of sound. Judging by audience size we were the star attraction but, how much of this was due to the fact that our show was free is difficult to say. Our method of presentation was perhaps not all that the purists of visual education could desire, but our main defence must be that it suited the customer. The film was an M.O.I. short commentated by Leslie Mitchell, whose honeyed voice was received with impassive faces by the audience of Chinese, Malays, Tamils, Sikhs and Eurasians. Closely following Mitchell's commentary was the commentator sitting in the P.A. Van and translating in Malay, the language understood by the great majority of people in Malaya. Although he had a powerful amplifier and the assistance of Mitchell he had absolutely no chance against the locals operating the side-shows who seemed to double their own volume of sound in order to hold their own against us, all done in a most friendly manner. But our trump card was the movie, nothing would shift the audience once the show had started. If they grasped the commentary they gave no sign of it, most of them being too busy explaining to each other what it was all about. I worked my way through the crowd looking at the wonderful variety of faces gazing intently at the screen, here a Chinese woman of the poorer class with a sleeping baby on her back, here a bearded Sikh, there a colourfully dressed Malay girl, near the screen a beautifully dressed Chinese in a white suit of European cut with his girl friend dressed in a three-quarter length frock with the slit side which many Chinese girls favour. It struck me then the commentating was superfluous at such a show, some of the films explained themselves while others were obviously beyond their comprehension but still they kept their eyes glued to the screen.

The show took an hour and a half and by the end of that time the audience had increased by 50 per cent until a solid mass of humanity was wedged in front of the screen. After the show they all trooped off home and as I rode homewards through the night I determined to learn Malay as soon as possible, if only to find out what they were talking about during the show. It is truly amazing to give a show near a native village which looks incapable of yielding more than a handful of an audience, only to find hundreds assembled by the time we are ready to start. Maybe they don't understand the commentary, but they are seeing something of the outside world after four years under the Japanese.

## REVIEWS

(*continued from page* 54)

**The New Mine.** G.B. Instructional for the British Council. *Director*: Irene Wilson. 18 mins.

Is it always the sponsor, or is it sometimes the over-zealous contractor, who insists on gilding the lily? Comrie Colliery in Fife is as up to date as anything in Britain, but, some time after this film describing it had been produced, your reviewer, who also wished to shoot there, was told bluntly by Dr. William Reid, the Managing Director of the colliery group, that he could only do so provided that he promised not to paint the place as perfect. "This is only a start," said Dr. Reid; "it is an experiment, from which we can learn to do much better."

But *The New Mine* finds everything at Comrie (even the ventilation system, which has been obligatory in all pits for many years) the highest pinnacle of achievement. And, curiously enough, in its enthusiasm it fails to make the most of those things of which Comrie is really proud. The surface at Comrie is a model for future mines, but the pretty shots do not attempt an explanation. The underground layout, with main haulage roads driven out level from the shaft-bottom irrespective of the rising and dipping coal-seams, so that coal can be brought back from points near the faces in forty-ton trains behind diesel-locomotives, is the most promising single improvement in British mining practice advocated by the Reid Report, but it is not even mentioned in the film.

Of course, we *see* the diesel-locomotives, and the skip-winding system, and the long and short-wall cutters, and the duckbill loaders, and the modern screening and washery plant; but it is all machinery for machinery's sake (usually presented without explanatory long-shot at that), and we are left little the wiser as to its inter-relating purpose. Your reviewer's attitude may seem hard on a film, which at the least is positive,

**Halas & Batchelor**

MEMBERS OF FEDERATION OF DOCUMENTARY FILM UNITS

CARTOONS
DIAGRAMS
MODELS

THE FOLLOWING ARTISTS ARE ENGAGED ON PRESENT PRODUCTIONS

John Halas, Joy Batchelor, Robert E. Privett, Rosalie Crook, Christine Jollow, Vera Linnecar, Elizabeth Williams, Freda Brown, Walter Beaven, Stanley Jackson, Stella Harvey, William Long, Rosalind Rogora, Richard Horn, Patricia Sizer, Edith Hampton, Victor Bevis, Marianne Zeisel, Brenda Phillips, Sound: Dr. E. H. Meyer.

**10a SOHO SQUARE W.1. GER 7681-2**

which gives some impression of what modern coal-mining can be like, but the coal problem is too serious for this kind of superficiality. If *The New Mine* is intended for general audiences, it may lead them to suppose that all mines are like this nowadays, and that the miner is continually grumbling about nothing. If it is intended for showing to miners and people in mining areas it is not technical enough, and its complacent commentary will convince nobody. So where does it get us? Your reviewer sat up and took notice when the film announced that output is 1,000 tons a day, but that the colliery was designed to produce 400 tons an hour. Why the discrepancy? And how to attract sufficient labour even to the most up-to-date mines in Britain was yet one more problem to which the film turned a blind eye.

**Vegetable Insects.** National Film Board of Canada. *Director*: Evelyn Cherry. *Distribution*: Non-T. 16 mm. 20 mins.

Shot on 16 mm. Kodachrome, with excellent colour values and great clarity, this is one of the best films of its type yet made. Evelyn Cherry (one of the pioneers of the documentary film movement and better known here as Evelyn Spice) has painstakingly and also imaginatively filmed the life and habits of most of the major insect pests, together with the main methods of destruction and control. Although the film was made for Canadian agricultural communities, much of it is highly relevant to this country, and all of it is fascinating.

Photographically the film is striking; it depends more on ultra close-ups than on actual micro-photography, and it must have involved endless patience to achieve the pin-sharp images of caterpillars, grubs, aphides, etc. Some of the sequences are dramatic in their impact, notably the fight between two parasites over an insect victim, and the devouring of a grasshopper by a praying mantis.

It is a pity that the commentary is not up to the standard of the rest of the film, it tries to say too much in too short a time. But the visuals do most of the talking, and to very good effect.

It is to be hoped that this film is only the first of a series. A film or films on fruit pests would be of great value and interest.

**Old Wives' Tales.** Halas Batchelor. *Director*: John Halas. *Music*: Matyas Seiber. *Distribution*: C.F.L. 9 mins.

This film sets out to expose three popular superstitions "Ne'er cast a clout till May be out"; "You've got to eat a peck of dirt before you die"; and "Night air is harmful".

It tackles the job by means of cartoon and diagram, and is aimed at grown-up audiences in a spirit of "How ridiculous and old-fashioned are the people who believe these things—figures of a cartoonist's fun!" For this sort of approach to an audience the cartoon convention is good—far better than live acting could be.

The main character is a small boy (reminiscent of a monochrome Pinnochio) on whose innocent person three old wives—Greataunt, Cook and Nurse—practice their harmful health principles. Greataunt swaddles him in mufflers under a blazing sun; Cook discourages him from washing his dirty hands before a meal, and also leaves the food uncovered so that it is fouled by flies from the uncovered dustbin; Nurse closes the windows of his bedroom against the harmful night air. The grown-up cartoon figures, excellently original creatures owing nothing to Disney, are interrupted by the voice of Reason (played by Commentator), who explains with the aid of animated diagrams the virtues of dressing to suit temperature and activity; and of food cleanliness and fresh air at all times.

Of these straight explanations the first is the least successful, as the diagram of the sweating skin is far too complicated and overloaded to be convincing. The second, which does not depart from the cartoon convention, is probably the best. "*Night* air is harmful" is the third hypothesis which has to be disproved; the film only shows that "Air is good", leaving it open to the half-educated to object, "Ah, but *night* air is different because flowers breathe out carbon dioxide at night."

More films exposing erroneous contemporary accepted ideas, not only in the health sphere, would be welcome.

**Your Children and You.** Realist Film Unit. *Producers*: John Taylor and Alex Shaw. *Director*: Brian Smith. *Camera*: A. E. Jeakins. *Music*: William Alwyn. *Distribution*: C.O.I. Non-T. 30 mins.

It would be difficult to think of a trickier job than to make a film instructing parents on their relations and behaviour to their children; parents are notoriously ready to be insulted or irritated on this question ("Mother knows best"), and the whole issue of the parental instinct *vis à vis* scientific discovery and knowledge is raised—more particularly since the field of child psychology is still at a very empirical stage.

In this film Brian Smith has surmounted these problems with the greatest success. He has avoided the new-fangled and the old-fashioned with equal skill, and by dishing up his instruction with a mixture of real humour and salty commonsense, he has avoided all offence. Throughout the film the handling of both children and parents is directorially admirable, and it is one of the first occasions in which the camera has consistently been used to present everything from the child's point of view. The film diverts as well as teaches. Alwyn's score is exactly right, commenting, where necessary, with wit and sympathy, and effacing itself otherwise.

*Your Children and You*, like the earlier films on Children's Eyes, Ears, etc., points to a whole field of production which has hardly as yet been scratched. It is to be hoped the job will go on.

**Catalogue of Films of General Scientific Interest.** *Compiled by the Scientific Film Association—Aslib* 1946. 5*s*.

The Scientific Film Association is to be congratulated on its first major publication. This is the most ambitious film catalogue yet published in Britain. It lists just on six hundred titles. Each film is sypnosised, and a great many of them are critically appraised. No less than sixty-five sources of scientific films are listed and in a useful introduction, the S.F.A. cataloguing and appraisal system is explained. The films are listed in alphabetical order, and the titles are classified under subjects in a separate index.

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**The Central Film Library** has issued a supplementary list of films. This may be obtained, post free, from the Imperial Institute, London, S.W.7. It contains all films added to the Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information collections since the issue of the last catalogue in 1944.


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*(Victor Gollancz, OUR THREATENED VALUES)*

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## PERSPECTIVE

*(continued from page 51)*

of just as much interest to the general public as to the staff of the General Post Office. In other words, the original documentary thesis—that people needed a sense and understanding of their participation in any and all activities of the State—was proved to be true in a different context from that of the EMB. Once proved, this thesis was obvious enough, for who were the post office staff if not the ordinary people of Britain in their connotation as workers? Hence the morale job of the films was doubled; for as far as GPO staff was concerned, they not only saw their jobs in a new light, they also saw themselves being seen in a new light by their fellow-citizens. Thus, the internal needs of a single department came to be equated with the general needs of public enlightenment—a fact which, as will be seen, was of significance in other fields.

Again, the specific needs of the GPO were further examined by the documentary group, and wider terms of reference were found. The communications system of the GPO was world-wide, especially in terms of airmail and radio, and it was only a short and very logical step from the technical communications networks of the GPO to the wider idea of communications as a function in international relations. There were no frontiers, no customs barriers, for radio. The GPO, then, largely through its films, found itself moving into wider and wider fields.

### Commercial Relations

Meanwhile, the bigger commercial organisations in Britain began to look for extensions of their operations in the then comparatively new field of public relations. The most notable example of this was the gas industry, which was beginning to suffer from the fact that it was, by comparison with electricity, being regarded by the public as an outdated and rather Victorian affair. The documentary solution to the problem was to relate the function of the gas industry to the whole area of public well-being. It was realised that a total improvement of community amenities meant a total improvement in the affairs of gas. So gas moved into the public welfare field, with sociological film studies of national problems and remedies, such as slum clearance, nutrition, education, local government, kitchen design, cooking methods, and so on. Almost overnight, they became identified in the public mind with progressive policies, and even received unsolicited praise as public servants in a *Times* leader. Their own problem was on the way to solution, and, at the same time, a notable contribution to public enlightenment had been made.

Other organisations acted in a similar way. Oil, through a documentary unit set up by Shell, produced the first film expositions of basic engineering principles ever made, and then branched out into other aspects of technology, such as scientific fruit growing, the mechanisation of agriculture, and so on. Imperial Airways in their own terms paralleled the communications story of the GPO; and many other examples could be quoted.

The rapidly growing demand involved a considerable expansion of the documentary movement. While the unit at the GPO remained, a number of production units, together with a central focusing point (Film Centre) were

formed. The non-theatrical system of distribution was adopted by the commercial sponsors, who used the road-show system and also operated their own free libraries in the same manner as the Government unit. The annual audience figure was rising towards the 10 million mark.

To the general public these documentary films often came to mean a chance of democratic discussion which had not, in any imaginative terms, been available to them before. It is to be noted that this new audience was the same audience as saw the feature pictures in the public cinemas. But they were in a different mood—a mood not of relaxation, but a mood of active participation. They wanted to know more, to discuss more, and to take part in the action arising from discussion —which is the basis of democracy.

The contribution of documentary to the international scene was considerable at this time. Groups appeared in other countries, not least in the U.S.A., and there was a growing exchange of ideas and personnel. Of special significance was the invitation issued to John Grierson and Basil Wright by the ILO in 1938 to draw up a report on the international exchange of films of public enlightenment. Although the war curtailed action on this report, it remains important as having enumerated the essential factors on which today UNO and UNESCO are basing their operations.

Hitherto the British Government had shown few signs of understanding the possibilities of a wider system of public information than that represented by the GPO Film Unit. The BBC and the Ministry of Labour had made use of the GPO Film Unit on one occasion each, the former to sponsor a feature-length film on its activities (this was a box-office success), and the latter to sponsor a short film on the work of its Labour Exchanges. Other than this, however, it was the commercial and industrial sponsors, and to a lesser degree the GPO Film Unit, which made the major contribution to the progressive use of documentary techniques in the public service.

Nevertheless, by 1938, it became clear to the Chamberlain Government that something was needed to counter the brilliantly organised and highly successful propaganda machine developed by Hitler and Goebbels, and also that in the event of war a co-ordinated information service would be essential. Accordingly, the BBC began to develop its overseas broadcasts, and preparations were made for the establishment of a Ministry of Information. Here, unfortunately, a grave mistake was made. War with Germany was inevitable, and yet the Government was reluctant to involve itself in a Ministry of Information as a going concern. It was obvious to anyone in the information field that a great deal of spade work was needed to set up such a Ministry, and that time was running out; but the Cabinet decision was to form only a skeleton organisation, whose task was to do a little vague thinking and to draw up plans for the formation of a real Ministry "in the event of war".

For this mistake Britain paid dearly in the first year of World War II. In September, 1939, a period of chaos, the Ministry of Information was formed, in a flurry of directives and counter-directives and a flood of staff appointments which, by and large, served only to overload the Ministry with desk-holders and chair-squatters. The BBC, according to plan, scattered itself over Britain, and did in fact get going on a wartime basis with a success which was not paralleled elsewhere. But in the MOI itself such confusion prevailed that all other branches of information


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**DATA**

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came to a standstill, or were otherwise stultified (for instance, it was now that the famous poster appeared: "*Your* courage, *Your* cheerfulness, will bring *Us* Victory"). First casualties of this confusion were the documentary units; not only did the commercial sponsors almost all close down their film activities, but the MOI failed (partly through muddle and partly through malice on the part of certain officials) to make any use of documentary; even the GPO Unit was ignored, and its first war film (*The First Days*) was made on the Unit's own initiative and without official authorisation.

In the summer of 1940 Britain was isolated, and stood alone against an apparently irresistible Germany. Just as this total danger united the people for the first time for twenty years, so it forced cohesion on to the information services. The MOI was now restaffed and the key posts filled by capable people. And at this point there was official realisation of what had long been plain—that the methods and techniques of the documentary group (not merely in terms of film, but in terms of a constructive approach to all problems of public information) provided a key weapon on the information battlefront. In particular, the system of non-theatrical distribution, and the ancillary services of pamphlets, exhibitions, etc., which went with it, had been developed by documentary both through the GPO and the commercial sponsors to a point at which all the Government needed to do was to expand and enlarge the existing machinery; there was no need to create something from scratch.

The rapid expansion and subsequent achievements in the field are now well known, and there is no need to describe them in detail. It is perhaps sufficient to say that output rose to a productivity of 200 reels of cut negative a year, that non-theatrical distribution achieved an annual audience of 24,000,000 covering all sections of the community, and that widespread theatre showings, both free and paid for, were achieved.

The basic problems of information (and therefore of informational films) in Britain during the war followed three major phases (*a*) the 1940 crisis, (*b*) total defence, and total effort leading to offence, (*c*) the residual achievement in terms of the "new world after the war". The first phase was simple. The impact of isolation and danger created unity, and the problem of information was only to focus and direct this sense of unity. It was necessary to provide rapid and certain information on short-term levels—about rationing, post-blitz community services, and so on. It was necessary to explain general war circumstances in their local reference. It was necessary to give the world overseas, and particularly the United States, a firm picture of British steadfastness and determination under attack. In all these efforts considerable success was achieved.

### The Second Phase

By 1941, with the defeat of the original Luftwaffe, came the second and longest phase. The simple situation of the previous year no longer obtained. The British people were in for a long hard grind, and the mobilisation of total effort and total productivity could be neither achieved nor maintained by short-term pep talks in any media. To maintain the morale of combatants who are in fact the whole of a nation, the mere message "Defeat the Enemy" is not valid over a long period. Reasons must be given. From the people themselves must be expressed, through the State, not merely what is to be done, but also

why. The why is not an easy question—it goes to the roots of a people's thought and feeling. The result of unity achieved under the stimulus of extreme danger is in the end a deep and disturbed questioning of the structure and activities of the State. So in Britain men and women in the light of their new-found unity looked with new eyes on the weary and dislocated society in which they had been living, and asked whether, after the war, they were going to find themselves back where they began, or not?

It was therefore essential to express these and similar feelings through the public information services of the State, for the needs of the total war effort were such that the problem could not be ignored (and the magnitude of the problem was subsequently to be demonstrated by the result of the 1945 General Election). Considerable freedom was therefore achieved (though not without some vicious battles with less imaginative Civil Servants) in the expression by the State of the desires of the people, even when those desires were not to the political liking of Ministers. This was the main and continuing victory of the information services of Britain, and was more and more reflected in them from the days of Priestley's first broadcasts until the end of the war with Germany.

### Special Services

Corollary aspects were the general penetration of the community through the special interests of its groups. At an early stage this documentary technique was adopted in all branches of information and public enlightenment. Special services were provided for the agricultural community, not only to farmers, but also to farm workers, to the Young Farmers' Clubs (which in themselves represented a great stride forward), and to the new agriculturalists represented by the amateur gardeners and allotment holders. To housewives went services on cooking, diet, clothes, conservation. To mothers went special services on prenatal and post-natal care, child health and welfare. These included special campaigns on such things as diphtheria immunisation and blood transfusion. Again, civil defence workers not only were enabled to change their techniques almost overnight by the co-ordinated use of all information media (and not least the film); they also were encouraged to discuss international issues through film shows, lectures and study groups.

One of the most sensational developments of the war years was the new system of Army education. The War Office—long known as the most crusted repository of backward thinking—reacted with such violence to the impact of total war that it became a pioneer in the educational field. With a largely conscripted Army it became clear that a citizen soldier would be a better fighting man if he knew and understood clearly the issues about which he was fighting. A system of Army education was therefore evolved, which was divided into two parts. Firstly, every opportunity was provided for soldiers either to continue their interrupted education or apprenticeship; and, in the case of Young Soldiers' Battalions, classroom work was a compulsory drill. A large panel of teachers and lecturers was assembled, and this included a number of men and women from all the Universities. Special arrangements were made for the use by soldiers of local technical colleges and evening institutes. Even to remote ack-ack batteries on lonely stretches of coast came lecturers and discussion leaders to supplement the tired, bedraggled troupes of ENSA.

### Role of ABCA

Secondly, ABCA—the Army Bureau of Current Affairs—was set up and put in the charge of the peacetime organiser of the Workers' Educational Association. ABCA was on all counts one of the most astonishing achievements of the war. Its basis was that at least once a week, and as a compulsory drill, each officer in the British Army should hold a free and open discussion with his men on current problems and developments at home and overseas. For these discussions ABCA provided regular wall newspapers, in colour and with world maps; discussion pamphlets for the assistance of officers; and discussion pamphlets for distribution to the men. Courses in ABCA were provided so that officers could learn the techniques of discussion leadership, and Commanding Officers were bound to send their staffs to these courses. Two or more main subjects for discussion were selected and issued by ABCA every fortnight. Their approach was impressive, ranging from the world strategy of oil to studies of local democratic problems such as housing, employment and indeed education itself. Not only were films extensively used by ABCA wherever possible, but also travelling play units, based partly on the Living Newspaper style developed in the USA and partly on British documentary technique, were developed and gave performances in camps, barracks and training centres. It was in the strongest centres of ABCA that morale was always found to be highest.

Tied in with Army education, and with the brilliant work of the Department of Army Psychiatry, new selection techniques were evolved to ensure that each man should be allocated to an army job for which his temperament, capabilities and previous experience best fitted him. This system eventually developed a method of officer selection which is second to none in the world. In this respect it is interesting to note, as an aspect of British information that the MOI issued two films, each lasting over 60 minutes, explaining the system in detail and with great clarity; and that *The Way Ahead*, one of the most successful feature films of the war, was an expanded re-make of an Army "morale" film, with a script written in collaboration with a group of Army psychiatrists.

### Films for the Colonies

A further example of the reflection of the new mood of questioning among the people was the revival of the work begun by EMB. The Colonial Office, through the MOI, instituted a campaign, in which films were mainly used, to provide both foreground and background information about the Colonial Empire. The bulk of this campaign dealt with East and West Africa, and a considerable number of films were made, both from existing material and by expeditions sent specially to Africa for the purpose.

### The Future

Today, in the confused and perplexing post-war world, the documentary idea and method, spearheaded still by film, has a great part to play.

It is too early yet to assess the value and potentialities of the new Central Office of Information. Its constitution gives it the opportunity to be an active and not a passive agency for public enlightenment and information, and it will be on the vigour and hard-thinking of its personnel that its success will depend.

Meantime, from the point of view of documentary, the needs are clear. They are:—

(1) The continuous development of all types of informational film, from the most highly specialised to the most box-office.
(2) Renewed efforts on the allied fronts of distribution and exhibition. The urgency now is for maximum screen-space and screen-time everywhere.
(3) Increased energies devoted to relations with the other mass-media, radio, television and the Press.
(4) The widening of horizons on the international front. The constrictions imposed by Britain's wartime isolation are over. Both thought and action are needed to spread documentary effort across the frontiers of the world.

Eighteen years of hard work and the meaning of the word documentary is still changing. Perhaps it needs no definition. A pithy phrase today may be meaningless tomorrow. Information, education, public relations, public policy, international relations have been taken, not without pain and strife, in its stride. It is recognised as Britain's major contribution to world cinema. Its influence on feature films has been more fundamental than is realised. That is the past and the present. The future will bring its own problems to change again the meaning of the word. The one aspect of documentary that will not change is its ability to be the spearhead in bringing a fresh and vital approach to public enlightenment.

*SIGHT and SOUND*

A cultural Quarterly

MONTHLY FILM BULLETIN

appraising educational and entertainment values

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# GRIERSON ON DOCUMENTARY

### Forsyth Hardy's compilation reviewed by Alex Shaw

READING Grierson's book is just like watching an evening's boxing. There's the ring flooded with a hard white light and there's the author putting up a terrific show, fighting in all the matches and, what's more, taking on all comers. No arranged matches for him. Sometimes he does try and fool us by pretending that he is acting as referee or critic, but he cannot keep it up for long. Bing bang and he's out there again punishing the aesthetes, the loose thinkers, the wishy-washy and the dull. But mostly the dull.

And just in case the reader should begin to glow with the self-righteousness that comes from feeling he is on the side of the angels, he packs a few unexpected punches designed to shatter anybody's self-composure.

The book consists of selections, admirably made by Forsyth Hardy, from Grierson's writings over the last sixteen years or so. It covers all kinds of subjects: Harpo Marx, Asquith, the Russian directors, the film in the school, propaganda and the film, the history of the documentary movement, the future of the film, the use of sound and a dozen and one such matters. Just for good measure he blows a smacking great kiss to the glorious Miss Mae West.

A lot of writers have tackled these subjects before and produced their own particular brand of cold suet pudding. Grierson has produced a magnificent, digestible and completely satisfying plum pudding complete with flaming spirits, a sprig of very prickly holly and lashings of brandy butter. And if I appear to have wandered from the boxing ring to the kitchen I can only say that it is that kind of book.

I tried marking the passages I thought ought to be quoted either as an example of how good it is or of how enraging Grierson can be. I eventually found that the whole book was scribbled over with scorings and asterisks and question marks. Anyway, it's not the sort of book to imagine you have read just because you think you have got the gist from some quotes in a review.

A lot of its vitality is due to the fact the stuff in it was written at different times but always with a purpose. There is no air of making up words for the sake of filling a space. And if time has left some of the secondary subjects rather stranded on the beach the only wonder is that so much of it is as vital today as it ever was.

In one respect time has betrayed the author. One of the earlier passages refers to his belief that sound would burst the bonds of voice and enrich the film with its possibilities. Having just seen a collection of the latest films from all over the world I can only say that the sound track has shrunk not expanded. Speech and music rule the tracks and tie the film down as it has never been tied since sound came in. Mexican, Russian, Portuguese and all talk and talk and talk.

It's possible that he was wrong in the first place. Or maybe we have all got a bit lazy.

Perhaps you are not interested in technicalities? Then try the pieces on the film in education, on the relationship between Government sponsored films and politics. Or if this is not your line read section one on the Directors of the Thirties and the Cinema of Ideas and then wonder what the author uses for a magic crystal.

But enough of this so-called review. Each section could start a dozen arguments or provide material for several articles. Read the book but be prepared to mix your appreciative nods with several frowns. Because someone is thinking and not softening the resulting blows.

It only remains to add that Forsyth Hardy has done an excellent introduction, written some useful notes and collected a fine selection of stills to which the publishers have done full justice.

(*Grierson on Documentary*. Edited by H. Forsyth Hardy. (Collins.) 15*s*.)

# MUNICIPAL CINEMA IN NORWAY

### FROM A CORRESPONDENT

THE FIRST public cinema in Norway was opened in Oslo in November, 1904. Perhaps it was the relative lateness in taking up the new art that allowed the Norwegian government to take a long view. Whatever the reason, a law passed in January, 1914, not only gave the Norwegian municipaljties power to control all film shows in their areas, but enabled them to build and open cinemas of their own and to forbid their introduction by private enterprise. The first town to take advantage of the new law was Notodden.

In 1918 the municipality of Oslo decided to forbid the opening of any new privately owned cinemas after January 1st, 1919. From January 1st, 1926, all privately owned cinemas were forbidden. Since that time, almost the whole film trade in Norway—cinemas, renting, studios and laboratories has been in the hands of the municipalities. The privately owned cinemas mainly belong to the co-operative movement and are very small. Though the exact number of cinemas after the German depredations in the North is at present uncertain, it is estimated that, in the spring of 1946, 104 municipally owned cinemas had a gross annual revenue of 35,000,000 kroner, while 146 privately owned cinemas grossed only 5,000,000 kroner. Of the total revenues, Oslo cinemas contributed about 33⅓ per cent, Bergen 7½ per cent, Trondheim 4½ per cent and Stavanger 3½ per cent. The Norwegian State levies a general tax of 40 per cent on the gross income, but Norwegian films—which are few and far between—are encouraged by a tax of only 25 per cent. Before the war, home-produced films were responsible for about 11 per cent of the gross yearly income. Film rentals are fixed at 30 per cent of the gross, and the American renters who attempted to force Norway to pay a higher percentage by withholding new films appear to have been defeated.

The municipal cinemas of Norway are all members of the "Kommunale Kinematografers Landsforbund". On behalf of its members, the KKL negotiates with film producers and the representatives of overseas film companies. It also publishes the only film trade paper in Norway, *Norsk Filmblad*, together with a yearbook. In 1919 the KKL set up its own renting organisation, the "Kommunenes Filmsentral A/S". In 1927 the Oslo section of the KKL bought the majority of the shares in the oldest renting company in Norway—"A/S Fotorama", and this is now merged with Kommunenes Filmsentral, which controls about one-third of all the renting in the country. The remaining two-thirds are divided between some fifteen private home and foreign distributors.

Kommunenes Filmsentral is not only a renting company. It is responsible for almost all the educational film activity in the country, with a catalogue containing 75 titles; it owns the biggest and best laboratory in Norway; it controls "Norsk Film A/S", the only studios in Norway; and it finances and runs the Norwegian newsreel. The one aspect of the film industry which has hitherto been neglected is the documentary, informational, and instructional film.

## SOCIETY, SCIENCE AND MOVIE

(*continued from page* 55)

however, to overcome this difficulty by collaboration with film producers who understand the issues involved. Preliminary discussion and investigation indicates that collaborative research on such topics as the psychological mechanism by which the film operates on the audience, the interests and attitudes of the audience in relation to specific films, the satisfactions provided by the film, might lead to the uncovering of facts which would be applicable to documentary and instructional film making. More specific topics for instruction might be the effect of musical background in films and the effects produced by real characters versus actors.

**The Sociatry of the Film**

In addition to research along the above lines, the general problem of the influence which the documentary and feature film exert in public life today has yet to be studied. Long-term research is needed to discover the extent to which films cement old values or create new ones, and thus assist or hinder the social maturing of the community. That this matter is of real importance is well illustrated by the picture built up in British minds of life in America, as a result of observing that country through the eyes of Hollywood.

That the film is a permanent part of modern culture and that it exercises a considerable influence on the world's view of itself, no one can doubt. If it is to be a constructive force, its mode of operation must be clearly understood. The collaborative examination of such problems by the film maker and the specialist in human relations may lead to an increasing understanding of the dynamics of the film as an art form and as a teaching medium.

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